

# Archives at the Millennium

Most of us regularly produce personal papers, such as correspondence and family photographs, as well as project files and reports. We produce documents as evidence of our actions, to capture our fugitive memories, to place our knowledge and information in a permanent form for future re-use, and as commemoration of our lives. The lifetime accumulations of these electronic, paper, and audiovisual documents are the raw materials of archives, as well as of history. Few of us realize just how short-lived many of our personal documents are.

Most of us have little experience in managing our records effectively, particularly fragile audiovisual and electronic document formats. Few of us produce and manage our papers in a way that ensures they will be around for our children's children. Yet in many cases, unless we are artists, filmmakers, or authors, these records are the only voice with which we can speak directly to the future. Our diaries; project files; web sites; photo albums and scrapbooks; memos, letters, and email, are often the only true proof of our activities, thoughts, and the events that shaped us. They are our legacy to future generations who will wonder who we were, why we did what we did, and what we were thinking. Without these papers, the record of our lives and our century may rapidly pass into the gray oblivion of the undocumented past.

This issue of *CRM* describes:

- what risks and challenges archives face today ("Is the Record of the 20th Century at Risk?," page 21)
- what the values of archives are ("The Value of Archives to NPS Historians," page 9)
- how an archives functions ("Archives—A Primer for the 21st Century," page 4),
- how to gather essential baseline data on your archives for management purposes ("Those Old Files...Surveying Archives in the National Park Service," page 35)
- how the National Park Service is cataloging archival collections ("Archives and the New NPS Collections Management System," page 34)
- how the archival profession has set standards for placing descriptive finding aids on the Web ("What is the Encoded Archival Description Standard?," page 28)
- how to obtain records management assistance from the National Archives ("Records Management Assistance from NARA," page 39)
- how to discover the best practices for preserving existing records you may have ("Preservation Information from the NPS," page 17)
- what an affiliated archives is ("What are Affiliated Archives?," page 42)
- how tribes are managing their archives ("The Archives and Special Collections of the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation," page 15)
- how parks are managing their archives including:
  - "The Historic Documents Department—San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park," page 12
  - "The Archives at the Mary McLeod Bethune Council House NHP," page 18
  - "Managing Documentary Resources—Independence National Historical Park," page 19
  - "Archival Reorganization at Little Bighorn Battlefield," page 29
  - "The Sewall-Belmont House National Historic Site—The Florence Bayard Hilles Library Opens to the Public," page 38
- who the stakeholders are that care how archives are managed, page 33
- how to find help on keeping archives, page 5
- where to find funding for keeping archive, page 6
- what archival terminology really means, page 46

We hope that this issue of *CRM* will inspire you to care for your own personal, family, and professional documents so that the record of your life and your century will be available to future historians, scholars, and students, some of whom may be your own descendants.

*Diane Vogt-O'Connor is Senior Archivist, National Park Service, and guest editor of this issue of CRM.*

## Note

This issue of *CRM* is linked to *CRM* Vol. 21, No. 6, "The Information Ecosystem," which can be accessed through the *CRM* homepage at <http://www.cr.nps.gov/crm>.